# France's new nuclear doctrine

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The new nuclear deterrence doctrine announced by President Jacques Chirac in January 2006 has rightly been recognized as ground-breaking and potentially momentous in its implications, although in fact several of the key changes in policy had already been set out in a speech he made in June 2001.[1] While France remains determined to deter threats from major powers, its main new preoccupation is deterring regional powers by making clear that it has developed more employable nuclear options. This article reviews the innovations in French doctrine, examines factors that may have contributed to the speech's timing, and considers some implications of the new strategy.

The innovations announced in January 2006 include the focus on deterring state sponsors of terrorism, the threat to attack an enemy's 'capacity to act', the more discriminate and controllable employment options, the willingness to launch 'final warning' strikes, the description of 'strategic supplies' as a potential vital interest, and the presentation of nuclear deterrence as the foundation of a strategy of prevention and, when necessary, conventional military intervention. Chirac's speech and subsequent official commentary have revealed new inflections even in areas of fundamental continuity, such as France's policy on missile defence and deterring major-power threats.

Despite official denials that the timing of the speech had anything to do with current circumstances, several factors may have led Chirac to make the speech at this juncture. These include maintaining the credibility of deterrence and presidential power, persuading the public and the armed forces to sustain the budgetary effort required for the nuclear posture, clarifying French deterrence doctrine for external and internal audiences, and sending a message of autonomy to Iran and France's key European partners. The new doctrine's implications include its significance

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[1] For background on issues in French nuclear strategy during the years immediately before Chirac's Jan. 2006 speech, see David S. Yost, 'France's evolving nuclear strategy', *Survival* 47, Autumn 2005, pp. 117–46.

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for deterrence and non-proliferation and for France's relations with its partners in NATO and the European Union.

## New elements

The most important new element in the doctrine is the clear assertion that state sponsors of terrorism are at risk of nuclear retaliation, if they harm France's vital interests. In Chirac's words, 'the leaders of states who would have recourse to terrorist means against us, as well as those who would envisage using, in one way or another, weapons of mass destruction, must understand that they expose themselves to a firm and appropriate response on our part'.[2] As Chirac pointed out in a speech in November 2001, the nuclear deterrent was never intended to work directly against terrorist groups, but was designed to apply to states.[3]

The explicitness in citing state sponsors of terrorism as adversaries that could threaten France's vital interests is new in a presidential-level speech, but it is consistent with long-standing policy. The assessment of whether the nation's vital interests are threatened has always been regarded as the president's responsibility under the constitution of the Fifth Republic, and the French have long been reluctant to define their vital interests precisely. As Alain Juppé, then foreign minister, said in 1995, 'our deterrent covers any challenge to our vital interests, whatever the means and origin of the threat, including of course that of weapons of mass destruction produced and used despite the international prohibitions that concern them'.[4] In other words, France's policy is similar to that of Britain and the United States in declining to regard negative security assurances as necessarily protecting users of chemical and biological weapons from nuclear retaliation.[5] As Bruno Tertrais, a well-informed analyst, pointed out in 2003, this 'vital interests' principle could also apply to deterring attacks against France with conventional missiles (perhaps aimed at nuclear or chemical industries), computer network means, sophisticated terrorist methods or radiological weapons, as long as these attacks were undertaken by an identifiable state.[6] One of the key purposes of Chirac's January 2006 speech, French experts have pointed out in interviews, was to warn potential state adversaries that they must not imagine that they could 'circumvent' France's nuclear deterrent by employing terrorist means.

[2] Jacques Chirac, speech at Landivisiau–l'Île Longue/Brest, 19 Jan. 2006, available at www.elysee.fr.

[3] Jacques Chirac, 'Discours lors de sa visite à la Marine Nationale, Toulon, 8 Nov. 2001', available at www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/discours_pr/081101.htm.

[4] 'Communication du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, M. Alain Juppé, à la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées du Sénat, Paris, 6 April 1995'.

[5] Negative security assurances are commitments by the nuclear-weapon states recognized under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon state parties to the NPT, subject to certain conditions. London, Paris and Washington have attached noteworthy caveats to these commitments. For background, see David S. Yost, 'New approaches to deterrence in Britain, France, and the United States', *International Affairs* 81:1, Jan. 2005, pp. 83–114.

[6] Bruno Tertrais, 'La dissuasion nucléaire française dans l'ère du post-11 septembre', *Les Cahiers de Mars*, no. 178, 3ème trimestre, 2003, pp. 115–16. Tertrais has also set out some hypothetical borderline 'limiting cases' (for instance, an attack against France with conventional missiles that caused few fatalities). The relevance of France's nuclear deterrent in such cases would depend on the judgement of the head of state.

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In March 2006, the French government published a White Paper outlining why France has become a target for terrorist attacks and specifying various attack scenarios. The long-standing grievances against France include

> a past presented as particularly oppressive (from the Crusades to colonization); a military presence in Muslim lands (for example, in Djibouti); the support expressed for 'apostate' regimes, especially in the Maghreb; the declared secularism [*laïcité*] of the republican state; the attempt to organize Islam according to a national model (with the creation in 2003 of the French Council of the Muslim Faith); and the determination of French judges and services to preventively neutralize terrorists and their accomplices.

In recent years these grievances have been supplemented by objections to the French law of 15 March 2004 on religious insignia in schools and to France's participation in military operations in Afghanistan. The possible attack scenarios include bombings on the model of those in Madrid in March 2004 and London in July 2005; strikes against critical infrastructures; and the employment of nuclear, radiological, chemical or biological means. In these circumstances, the White Paper states, France must 'not exclude any response'. It recalls President Chirac's January 2006 speech and takes note of France's right to self-defence under article 51 of the UN Charter.[7]

In testimony regarding Chirac's January 2006 speech, Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie suggested that states might employ terrorist means to attack France and that terrorists might gain control of a failing state armed with weapons of mass destruction:

> Faced with regional powers wishing to acquire nuclear weapons, it [France] must take into account the danger of terrorist groups being used by their governments. Facing also states armed with weapons of mass destruction whose governments could have failed, transforming them into lawless zones, it must consider the implications that would follow the seizure of power by a terrorist network.[8]

In his June 2001 speech, Chirac noted that 'regional powers armed with weapons of mass destruction could … threaten European territory'. Such powers, he went on to say, would face 'absolutely unacceptable' damage, and 'the choice would not be between the total annihilation of a country and doing nothing. The damage to which a possible aggressor would be exposed would be directed above all against his political, economic, and military power centres.'[9] Chirac repeated these ideas in his January 2006 speech, and added that France's instrument of deterrence is its increasingly precise and controllable ability to strike the adversary state's 'power centres, its capacity to act', with nuclear weapons.

[7] Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, *La France face au terrorisme: Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme* (Paris: La Documentation Française, March 2006), pp. 33–7, 76–8, 95. See also Piotr Smolar, 'La France se dote d'une doctrine antiterroriste', *Le Monde*, 8 March 2006.

[8] Michèle Alliot-Marie, Ministre de la Défense, 'Audition devant la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées, Sénat, 1 Feb. 2006'.

[9] Jacques Chirac, speech at the Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale, 8 June 2001, available at www.elysee.fr.

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Chirac's reference to holding an adversary's 'capacity to act' at risk is a second new element. In a subsequent briefing by a high-level military source, the French government explained how an enemy state's 'capacity to act' could be distinct from its 'power centres'. According to press accounts, the military source said that France could explode a nuclear weapon at high altitude (between 100 and 200 kilometres) and thereby create an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that could jam, cripple or destroy all of an enemy's non-EMP-hardened computers and communications systems. Depending in part on the altitude and magnitude of the EMP, all electronic systems within a radius of hundreds of kilometres could be affected, and 'the country attacked would be on its knees for years', although the nuclear explosion would not produce fatal blast, heat or radioactive effects.[10]

As the EMP attack threat implies, France has been seeking more discriminate and controllable employment options. Another new element along these lines underscored in Chirac's January 2006 speech was the possibility that some French submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) could carry a smaller number of warheads than others. This confirmed that France might undertake what is sometimes called a 'split launch'—that is, launching only one or a few missiles instead of the entire boatload of 16 missiles, as had been France's policy during the Cold War and beyond.[11] An SLBM equipped with only one or two warheads could cause much less destruction than one armed with six warheads, particularly if these warheads were delivered with great accuracy. Moreover, the warhead need not be detonated with its full yield potential; the option of exploding only the first-stage 'primary' (what the French call the *amorce*) is available. Finally, an SLBM with fewer warheads would have greater range options.

A related new element in Chirac's speech was his reinstatement of the expression 'final warning' (*ultime avertissement*): 'We still maintain, of course, the right to employ a final warning to signify our determination to protect our vital interests.' This was a recycling of a phrase used regularly until the early 1990s, when the terms 'prestrategic' and 'final warning' gradually disappeared from official discourse.[12] The French have since the early 1990s increasingly described all their nuclear weapons as 'strategic'.

French sources have pointed out that the context and operational content of a 'final warning' use of nuclear forces today would differ from what was anticipated during the Cold War, when the French first employed the term as part of their

[10] Jean Guisnel, 'Innovation française', *Le Point*, 9 Feb. 2006. See also Jean-Dominique Merchet, 'Davantage de souplesse dans la dissuasion nucléaire', *Libération*, 9 Feb. 2006; Laurent Zecchini, 'La guerre nucléaire "propre"?', *Le Monde*, 3 March 2006. According to one interview source, the threat to conduct an EMP attack is 'controversial' within the government and the extent to which this threat should be regarded as a central element of the new doctrine is therefore 'speculative'.

[11] According to Laurent Zecchini, the decision to deploy fewer warheads on some missiles was made in 2001 and its implementation began in 2003. Zecchini, 'La guerre nucléaire "propre"?'

[12] In 1995 Alain Juppé, then prime minister, referred to the 'final warning' option in the past tense in a discussion of factors contributing to 'the hostility of German opinion towards nuclear weapons'. One of these factors, Juppé noted, was 'the memory of a recent period in which German soil was at risk of becoming the principal theatre of a nuclear war and perhaps also that of the "final warning" foreseen by our own doctrine'. 'Allocution du Premier Ministre, M. Alain Juppé, devant l'Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale, 6 Sept. 1995'.



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nuclear doctrine. The original meaning of 'final warning' was an attack with significant military effects intended to persuade the Soviet Union to stop a westward offensive. In a confrontation with a regional power in current and foreseeable circumstances, however, French sources note, the 'final warning' strike conducted by France would differ from that in many ways. France's delivery systems would be more flexible, accurate and controllable; the warhead yields might be smaller; and the targets would be selected with the intention of demonstrating France's ability to destroy the adversary state's 'power centres, its capacity to act'. In her January 2006 testimony about the President's speech, the minister of defence said:

> In fact, a potential adversary might think that, given its principles and its known respect for human rights, France would hesitate to use the entire yield of its nuclear arsenal against civil populations. The President of the Republic has underlined that our country has made its capabilities for action more flexible and henceforth has the possibility of targeting the decision centres of a potential aggressor, thereby avoiding the excessive general effects capable of making us hesitate.[13]

In subsequent testimony, the minister added that 'the targeting of decision centres … responded to the necessity of being able to strike the operational means of regimes by nature not that sensitive to the risks run by their population'.[14] According to some French sources, an EMP attack would be particularly well suited to transmitting a devastating but theoretically non-lethal 'final warning' message affecting an enemy's 'capacity to act',[15] while an attack against 'power centres' would cause truly unacceptable damage to his political, military and/or economic resources.

Chirac announced another innovation in his January 2006 speech by stating that 'the guarantee of our strategic supplies' could in some circumstances be regarded as a vital interest to be protected by nuclear deterrence. The Defence Minister specified that the phrase used by Chirac included 'energy' resources.[16] This degree of precision in a presidential speech seems unprecedented. Historically, the French have offered explanations as to why it would be unwise to define which 'vital interests' might be covered by nuclear deterrence.[17] In the most recent defence White Paper, published in 1994, the 'air and maritime approaches' to France were included in the definition of 'core' vital interests, but 'strategic supplies' were not. In fact, 'assuring the liberty of circulation of our strategic supplies' was listed as one of France's objectives in a 'regional conflict not threatening our vital interests';

[13] Michèle Alliot-Marie, Ministre de la Défense, 'Audition devant la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, 25 Jan. 2006'.

[14] Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées, Sénat, 1 Feb. 2006'.

[15] Zecchini, 'La guerre nucléaire "propre"?'.

[16] Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, 25 Jan. 2006'.

[17] For example, in 1982 Charles Hernu, then defence minister, wrote, 'Are they tied to geographic, economic, and political criteria? I will respond that we are the judges of that, and not the adversary, who will have to make an inventory of all that we might place in that category. It is up to him to make hypotheses, knowing that an error of analysis could turn out to be immediately mortal.' Charles Hernu, 'La politique et la volonté de défense', *Politique Internationale*, no. 16, Summer 1982, p. 13.

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and the security of France's supplies via maritime routes was listed with the nation's 'strategic interests' rather than with its 'vital interests'.[18]

The French have in recent years defined the four 'operational functions' of their armed forces as deterrence, prevention, projection and protection. Chirac's innovation in this regard in his January 2006 speech was to present nuclear deterrence as the 'ultimate expression' of the prevention function and the back-up for its conventional military intervention capabilities. In Chirac's words,

> In the face of the crises that shake the world, in the face of new threats, France has always first chosen the road of prevention. It remains, in all its forms, the very basis of our defence policy … To be heard, one must also, when necessary, be able to use force. We must therefore have an important capacity to intervene beyond our frontiers with conventional means in order to uphold and complete this strategy. Such a defence policy relies on the certainty that, whatever happens, our vital interests will be protected. That is the role assigned to nuclear deterrence, which is directly in keeping with the continuity of our strategy of prevention. It constitutes its ultimate expression.

It should be recalled that Chirac chose to give this speech at a location that underlined the fact that France has two types of nuclear delivery systems. The submarine base at Île Longue and the Naval Air Station at Landivisiau are in close proximity, near Brest. This conjunction provided an apt setting for a speech highlighting the acquisition and continuing pursuit of new yield, range and targeting options for both SLBMs and air-launched ASMP missiles, the latter deliverable by both ground-based and carrier-based aircraft.[19] An essential element of Chirac's January 2006 speech was to confirm that France has acquired many of the more discriminate and controllable employment options called for in his June 2001 speech.

## Inflections within continuity

Chirac's speech and subsequent official commentary have included new inflections even in some areas of fundamental continuity. For example, Chirac's discussion of missile defence was consistent with France's policy since the anti-ballistic missile treaty regime between Moscow and Washington ended in 2002. That is, France is continuing its work (in cooperation with Italy) on missile defences for deployed forces, and participating in the NATO feasibility study about 'protecting Alliance territory, forces and population centres against the full range of missile

[18] The 1994 White Paper stated that 'The integrity of the national territory, consisting of the homeland and the overseas departments and territories, and its air and maritime approaches, the free exercise of our sovereignty, and the protection of the population constitute the heart' [or 'core'] of France's vital interests.' The document distinguished France's 'vital interests' from its 'strategic interests' and its 'interests that correspond to its international responsibilities and rank in the world'. It specified two main 'strategic interests': (a) 'the areas essential to the country's economic activity and freedom of trade and communications', including the security of the nation's supplies, notably via maritime routes; and (b) 'the maintenance of peace on the European continent and in the zones that border it to the east and the south, in view of the exceptional strategic importance of the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East'. However, it also said that 'The frontier between France's vital interests and strategic interests cannot be specified in advance … The demarcation of this frontier depends on the country's political authorities.' Ministère de la Défense, *Livre blanc sur la défense* (Paris: Service d'Information et de Relations Publiques des Armées, Feb. 1994), pp. 24–5, 57, 64–5.

[19] ASMP stands for *air-sol moyenne portée* — that is, an air-to-ground medium-range missile. The ASMPA (*ASMP amélioré*) is the improved version.

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threats' chartered at the 2002 Prague summit.[20] Chirac's caveats about missile defence—that no defensive system can be totally effective, and that defences cannot replace nuclear deterrence—have been standard French talking points for years. However, he expressed an unusually positive tone in stating that missile defence could complement deterrence 'by diminishing our vulnerabilities'. In the light of France's long-standing strictures against strategic missile defences as inconsistent with deterrence, this new tone constitutes a quasi-breakthrough on the conceptual level.

Similarly, Chirac included a new point with respect to the original, enduring and most important objective of France's nuclear forces—deterring major-power threats. The President devoted only a sentence to this objective: 'We are able to inflict damage of all kinds on a major power that might wish to attack interests that we would judge vital.' Chirac's use of the phrase 'damage of all kinds' deliberately left the threat vague, and this was consistent with the abandonment since the early 1990s of France's previous 'anti-cities' threats. However, this phrase could encompass the more limited and controllable strike options Chirac discussed with regard to regional powers.

Chirac implicitly referred to potential major-power threats by observing that France is 'not shielded from an unforeseen reversal of the international system, nor from a strategic surprise'. Moreover, he pointed out that the M51 SLBM will have an intercontinental range. As noted above, arming the SLBM with fewer warheads would give it greater range and accuracy, and this could give France new 'final warning' options in confrontations with major powers as well as with regional powers. The need to be able to threaten China and other distant powers in Eurasia and the Middle East is reported to constitute one of the rationales for the M51 SLBM's long range. Government officials have in public statements avoided referring explicitly to China as a possible target of France's deterrent posture, but have instead made comments such as Alliot-Marie's January 2005 declaration in support of the M51 SLBM: 'To ensure our security, we must show our capability to strike anywhere in a precise fashion from a non-identifiable base.'[21]

Chirac's speech, rich as it was in new elements, did not in fact include certain innovations that have been attributed to it, notably with regard to nuclear pre-emption. The President stated that 'the leaders of states who would have recourse to terrorist means against us, as well as those who would envisage using, in one way or another, weapons of mass destruction, must understand that they expose themselves to a firm and appropriate response on our part'. His use of the conditional tense in 'would envisage' (*envisageraient*) created an ambiguity that was interpreted by *Le Monde* as implying a willingness to use nuclear weapons on a pre-emptive or preventive basis against an adversary planning to attack France's vital interests: 'This formulation calls to mind the American doctrine of preventive action underlined in the strategic doctrine adopted by the Bush administration after the attacks

[20] Prague summit declaration, issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Prague on 21 Nov. 2002, paragraph 4g.

[21] Alliot-Marie, quoted in Yves Cossais, 'Une cathédrale pour le missile M.51', *Ouest-France*, 12 Jan. 2005.

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of 11 September 2001.'[22] However, French sources have indicated that *Le Monde*'s interpretation of Chirac's statement is incorrect. (*Le Monde*'s depiction of US policy is also mistaken, it should be noted, to the extent that it attributes to the United States an intention to use nuclear weapons preventively.[23]) While neither Chirac nor any of his predecessors as president has explicitly ruled out the preventive or pre-emptive employment of nuclear weapons, these weapons are viewed above all as instruments of deterrence. From this perspective, operational employment—the 'firm and appropriate response' to which Chirac referred—would be in retaliation for an enemy's attack; and the threatened response is intended to deter such an attack. It would, according to French sources, be an error to regard Chirac's statement as an endorsement of preparations for pre-emptive nuclear action or to infer that France would use nuclear weapons solely on the basis of an adversary's apparent intentions to attack.

It should nonetheless be noted that in the military programme law for 2003–2008 and other policy statements France has endorsed pre-emptive action with conventional means against terrorists. The French have, moreover, asserted that their will and capability to undertake pre-emptive action in certain circumstances might deter some aggressors, including terrorists.[24] The true similarity of French and US policies in this domain resides in both governments avoiding the formulation of a declared policy on the preventive or pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons while improving their preparedness to undertake preventive or pre-emptive action with conventional forces.[25]

Moreover, Chirac did not break new ground in suggesting that the vital interests to be protected by France's nuclear deterrent might include allied countries. Indeed,

[22] 'Chirac et la bombe', *Le Monde*, 21 Jan. 2006.

[23] Official US policy statements have long been purposely vague and ambiguous as to whether Washington would use or consider using nuclear weapons in response to an enemy's use of weapons of mass destruction (customarily defined as chemical, biological and/or nuclear weapons). The words 'devastating' and 'overwhelming' have been favoured to describe America's response options. For example, in 1996 William Perry, then Secretary of Defense, said, 'if some nation were to … attack the United States with chemical weapons, then they would have to fear the consequences of a response from any weapon in our inventory . . . In every situation that I have seen so far, nuclear weapons would not be required for response. That is, we could make a devastating response without the use of nuclear weapons, but we would not forswear that possibility.' Secretary Perry's remarks at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 26 April 1996. On 22 Feb. 2002, Richard Boucher, a State Department spokesman, said, 'If a weapon of mass destruction is used against the United States or its allies, we will not rule out any specific type of military response.' Similarly, according to a subsequent White House statement, 'The United States will continue to make clear that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force—including through resort to all of our options—to the use of WMD against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies.' *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Washington DC: The White House, Dec. 2002), p. 3. Such statements concern possible US responses to an adversary's use of WMD. The United States does not have a declared policy of being prepared to conduct pre-emptive or preventive nuclear attacks. Although no such policy has been articulated, some observers and critics have asserted that there is one. The basis for these assertions is unclear. It may be a misunderstanding or mischaracterization of US policy, or perhaps a rather hasty extrapolation from documents such as the 2002 *National Security Strategy*, the Nuclear Posture Review findings made public in early 2002, and the 2005 draft (and never approved) Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations.

[24] 'Loi no. 2003-73 du 27 janvier 2003 relative à la programmation militaire pour les années 2003 à 2008', section 2.3.1., 'Les fonctions stratégiques', available at www.legifrance.gouv.fr.

[25] It should be noted that preventive actions need not consist of 'preventive strikes' or 'preventive war'. Preventive actions may include, for example, the enforcement of weapons embargoes, the interception of illicit technology transfers, the conduct of stabilization and reconstruction activities, and the deployment of peacekeeping forces between former (or prospective) belligerents.

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as far back as the 1972 defence White Paper, the French government noted that 'Western Europe as a whole cannot fail to benefit indirectly from French strategy, which constitutes a stable and determining factor of security for Europe … Our vital interests lie within our territory and the surrounding areas.'[26] French officials have made many similar statements over the subsequent decades, although the French have consistently refused to participate in the deliberations of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group or to make consultation commitments to their NATO allies similar to those made by the United Kingdom and the United States. Chirac himself made a comparable statement about the growing solidarity of the European Union and its significance for France's nuclear deterrent posture in his June 2001 speech. As he noted in his January 2006 speech, France proposed a *dissuasion concertée* arrangement in cooperation with EU partners in 1995.[27] (The phrase *dissuasion concertée* might be translated as 'deterrence supported by continuing consultations and substantive consensus'.[28]) This revival of an old theme is relevant because some official statements have implied that it may have been one of the factors affecting the speech's timing.

## Internal motives

To what extent was the timing of Chirac's speech linked to specific domestic political factors? According to the defence minister, it 'was in no way tied to the current circumstances because it had been foreseen for almost a year that the head of state would speak on this subject'.[29] The speech was reported to have been initially scheduled for October 2005, but postponed because of the President's health problems.[30] Moreover, many of the technical improvements—including changes in the command and control system—to support more differentiated nuclear options were completed by early 2005.

[26] *Livre blanc sur la défense nationale* (Paris: Ministère de la Défense, 1972), vol. I, pp. 8–9.

[27] Chirac did not mention that at one point during the *dissuasion concertée* episode in the mid-1990s France also expressed a willingness to discuss nuclear deterrence matters in the North Atlantic Council. Gérard Errera, then France's Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council, indicated on 17 January 1996 that 'a dialogue on nuclear questions could be introduced within the framework of the [North Atlantic] Council, according to arrangements to be determined'. This initiative does not, however, appear to have led to any actual dialogue on nuclear questions involving France and its NATO allies. For background, see Jacques Isnard, 'La France n'exclut pas de parler de la "dissuasion concertée" à l'OTAN', *Le Monde*, 16 Dec. 1995; 'Pour la première fois depuis 1966, la France accepte de parler du nucléaire au sein de l'OTAN', *Le Monde*, 18 Jan. 1996; 'L'OTAN accueille favorablement le projet français de "dialogue" sur la dissuasion nucléaire', *Le Monde*, 19 Jan. 1996. The last of these articles quoted the clarifying statement by Michel Barnier, then France's minister for European affairs: 'France never proposed opening a discussion in the Nuclear Planning Group and, even less, participating in any decision on the planning of nuclear forces … France has no intention to participate in the Defence Planning Committee or to join the Nuclear Planning Group.'

[28] Alliot-Marie echoed official French formulas from the mid-1990s in declaring that '*dissuasion concertée* constituted neither a bestowed deterrence, nor a common deterrence, but was aimed at establishing a discussion on the protection of closely interwoven interests'. Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées, Sénat, 1 Feb. 2006'.

[29] Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, 25 Jan. 2006'.

[30] 'Problèmes de communication', *TTU: Lettre hebdomadaire d'informations stratégiques*, no. 569, 25 Jan. 2006, p. 6. According to a French interview source, a new presidential speech on nuclear deterrence had been considered as early as 2004.

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Three internal political motives may nonetheless have contributed to the decision to make the speech at this juncture instead of postponing it further. First, Chirac and his government probably wished to assert the continuing credibility of deterrence and presidential power. The President had not given a major speech on nuclear deterrence since June 2001. Indeed, some French observers regard the speech as overdue, and point out that early 2006 may have been the last opportunity to make such a speech prior to the 2007 presidential election campaign in France. By making this speech, the President could remind the public that he was still the commander-in-chief and counter the 'lame duck' effect of declining political influence in the months before his mandate comes to an end in May 2007.

Second, Chirac was clearly determined to justify and explain the budgetary effort required for the nuclear posture both to the public and to the armed forces. In recent years, despite the fact that the cost of the nuclear forces as a proportion of the defence budget has reached 'an historic minimum' of 9.5 per cent,[31] proposals to cut back nuclear force investments have been gaining support among military officers and politicians who favour increased spending on conventional forces and other capabilities. Chirac's remarks can be interpreted as a plea to France's politicians (including his prospective successors) to sustain the current modernization effort and not cut spending on nuclear forces:

> It would be irresponsible to imagine that maintaining our current arsenal could, after all, suffice. What would become of the credibility of our deterrent if it did not permit us to respond to new situations? What credibility would it have *vis-à-vis* regional powers if we had stayed strictly with a threat of total annihilation? What credibility in the future would a ballistic weapon have with a limited radius of action? Thus, the M51 [SLBM], thanks to its intercontinental range, and the ASMPA [air-launched missile] will give us in an uncertain world the means to cover threats from wherever they may come and whatever they may be … Today, in the spirit of strict sufficiency that characterizes it, our deterrence policy represents overall less than 10 per cent of our total defence budget. The credits dedicated to it concern high technology and support massively and essentially our country's scientific, technological, and industrial effort. Ten per cent of our defence effort is a fair and adequate price to pay to equip our country with an assurance of security that is credible and lasting. And I tell you, to put it into question would be perfectly irresponsible.

The third internal motive follows from the second. In the absence of sufficient public articulations of policy, Tertrais has argued, 'ambiguities' and mistaken impressions about the nation's deterrence doctrine could emerge. In his view, Chirac's speech has underscored the relevance of the nuclear deterrent as the ultimate back-up for France's intervention and crisis management policy, and this function should be understood by the nation's military establishment as well as external powers: 'The message is addressed to the military [officers] who question the nuclear expenses: if France can intervene anywhere in the world, it is because it knows itself protected against the blackmail of a power that would like to prevent us from defending our interests.'[32]

[31] Bruno Tertrais, 'La dissuasion nucléaire reste adaptée', *Défense*, no. 110, March–April 2004, p. 15.
[32] Bruno Tertrais, 'Les vertus de la dissuasion nucléaire française', *Le Figaro*, 21 Jan. 2006, p. 20.

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## External motives

The key external political motives concern France's allies and potential adversaries. With regard to allies, in the same testimony in which she denied that there was any link to current circumstances in the timing of Chirac's speech, Defence Minister Alliot-Marie said that 'the moment has come to re-launch discussions' in the European Union about nuclear deterrence, 'all the more so because threats are multiplying'. She declared that 'many European heads of state and government have made known to the French authorities that they have understood perfectly the speech by the President of the Republic … Dialogues with our European partners take place, but only at the highest institutional level and with discretion, in order to guarantee the secrecy necessary for effectiveness.'[33] Her testimony in this respect was surprising, because many French experts interpreted Chirac's comments about the 1995 *dissuasion concertée* initiative as wistful rather than purposeful—that is, as regretting that nothing came of it rather than as intended to relaunch it.

In apparent contradiction of the defence minister's view that France wishes to relaunch dialogue with EU partners about nuclear deterrence, some French interview sources hold that Paris had a message for London and Berlin after the failure of the EU-3 diplomacy with Iran—the message being that France is capable of autonomous action and reasons accordingly. Moreover, they assert, France has greater freedom of strategic manoeuvre than either the United Kingdom, which is 'too closely tied to the United States', or Germany, which lacks 'autonomous strategic means'. In short, some French observers say, France's EU partners should recognize that France is one of the few states capable of action regarding Iran, owing to its military capabilities and engagement in the Middle East.[34]

In her testimony, Alliot-Marie added that Chirac's phrase 'allied countries' was deliberately left undefined and that these allies are 'not necessarily limited solely to the member states of the European Union'.[35] French sources have noted that the phrase 'allied countries' replaced the phrase 'European territory' used in the June 2001 speech,[36] and have indicated that the phrase could also refer to non-EU NATO countries and, in some circumstances, countries of the Persian Gulf—a seemingly unprecedented extension of France's 'vital interests'.

The main external motive for articulating new deterrence policies is, to be sure, to send a 'to whom it may concern' message and thereby influence the decisions of potential adversaries.[37] According to French sources, Chirac was telling France's

[33] Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, 25 Jan. 2006'.

[34] It should be noted that other French interview sources dispute this interpretation and maintain that specific external political considerations (including relations with Iran) were much less important than domestic factors and general doctrinal motives.

[35] Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, 25 Jan. 2006'.

[36] Laurent Zecchini, 'Jacques Chirac défend la pertinence de la dissuasion nucléaire', *Le Monde*, 19 Jan. 2006.

[37] Chirac's reference in his 19 Jan. 2006 speech to the need 'to cover threats from wherever they may come and whatever they may be' reminded some observers of France's official '*tous azimuts*' (all the points of the compass) rhetoric regarding nuclear deterrence in 1967–8. France and its NATO allies expressed a determination 'to meet the challenges to the security of our forces, populations and territory, from wherever they may come' in the Prague summit declaration, 21 Nov. 2002, para. 3.

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potential adversaries that they cannot count on Paris feeling constrained about taking action owing to fear of the consequences of using nuclear weapons. In other words, France has acquired more usable options and could conduct what some French experts have called 'a strategy of intimidation' with them, undertaking 'final warning' operations if necessary, with confidence that the nation's 'vital interests' are protected by its nuclear deterrent posture.

Despite official denials that the speech had any relation to the Iran crisis, Chirac surely knew when he chose to make it at this juncture that it would be interpreted in light of the Iranian situation; and he was evidently willing to accept that prospect. Of course, Chirac made no reference to Iran or any other specific potential adversary in his speech.[38] However, the reference to state sponsors of terrorism has been widely regarded as an implicit reference to Iran. Moreover, the concern with 'strategic supplies' of energy resources and the prospect that the Gulf countries may be covered by French nuclear protection fit in with the idea that the speech's timing and content were influenced by the Iran situation.

Some French sources maintain that France's highlighting of its nuclear strike capabilities may have a positive effect in the diplomacy concerning Iran, by making it clear that France has usable military options (conventional and nuclear) and that it would therefore be imprudent for Iran to seek nuclear arms. This message might serve as one factor, among others, influencing Iranian decision-making. The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Henri Bentégeat, said the day after Chirac's speech that

> Iran is indeed certainly a major anxiety, because Iran is a country demonstrating extremely warlike intentions, such as, for example, the will to destroy the state of Israel, and it is not conceivable for us that a state that does not respect the rules of the international community could try to acquire nuclear weapons contrary to all the international treaties.[39]

## Lowering the threshold?

Chirac said a few days after his landmark speech that the new strategy did not represent 'any lowering of the nuclear threshold'.[40] However, critics in France and elsewhere in Europe have expressed concern that it might increase the likelihood of nuclear use in various ways, from extending the list of potential 'vital interests' in some circumstances to 'strategic supplies', to devising nuclear weapons with more discriminate and controllable effects. One of the criticisms of France's new approach, at home and abroad, has been that it raises the risk of a 'banalization' of the nuclear threat.

[38] French interview sources have pointed out that the March 2006 White Paper on terrorism avoids attributing any responsibility to states widely regarded as implicated to some extent in the terrorist attacks against France in the 1980s and 1990s, including Iran, Lebanon, Libya and Syria. The White Paper does, however, refer to the nationalities of some of the people accused of organizing terrorist attacks that were successfully foiled. Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, *La France face au terrorisme: Livre blanc du Gouvernement sur la sécurité intérieure face au terrorisme* (Paris: La Documentation Française, March 2006), pp. 131–4.

[39] Interview with the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Henri Bentégeat, on RTL, 20 Jan. 2006, available at www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/ema.

[40] Chirac quoted in Laurent Zecchini, 'Chirac et le nucléaire: L'Europe silencieuse, l'Iran critique', *Le Monde*, 26 Jan. 2006.

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In an editorial on Chirac's speech, the *Financial Times* endorsed the logic of reinforcing deterrence with more employable weapons: 'the greater the prospect of France being able to limit the scope of a nuclear strike, the greater the chance of a French president daring to order one, and therefore the greater the potential deterrent effect of the *force de frappe*'.[41] While there might well be some merit in the decades-old argument that weapons with more limited and controllable effects would enhance deterrence by making a threatened nuclear response appear more feasible and hence more credible in the eyes of a specific adversary, such weapons would probably not in fact simplify decisions in Paris in an actual crisis to threaten to use or to actually employ nuclear weapons by more than a marginal degree.[42]

As a result, while France will probably continue to develop more controllable nuclear employment options with a view to enhancing deterrence, sending a signal of restraint and determination, and/or limiting damage in desperate circumstances, the French will also seek various means to reduce their dependence on threats of nuclear retaliation. As in the past, and as with US and NATO policy, the preferred approach will be to uphold and strengthen, if possible, the array of deterrence and containment measures—including arms control in some areas—intended to lower the likelihood of conflict, terrorism and proliferation. In view of the fallibility of international norms, arms control measures, export control regimes and other arrangements, hedges against their failure will include military preparations. France's more positive attitude towards missile defence is significant in this regard.

Whether the threshold for nuclear employment has been genuinely lowered or may simply be perceived as lowered by some adversaries, thereby reinforcing deterrence, is only one of the practical questions raised by the new strategy. For example, will its nuances be properly understood by France's adversaries?[43] François Heisbourg has asked,

> What type of [terrorist] attack could provoke a nuclear response: London, Madrid, or something like 11 September? The limit is impossible to fix precisely. The risk in wanting to be too precise is that of putting oneself in situations in which one looks weak.[44]

How should France's adversaries and other nations interpret Chirac's statement that 'the guarantee of our strategic supplies' could in some circumstances be regarded as a vital interest to be protected by nuclear deterrence? Would France threaten nuclear retaliation against a government that decided to stop selling oil to it, or against an adversary hindering the shipment of its energy supplies? Or would such a threat be too disproportionate to be credible?

[41] 'Relevance of "force de frappe" to terrorist age', *Financial Times*, 20 Jan. 2006.

[42] According to Jean Klein, a scholar at the Institut Français des Relations Internationales, 'the decisions taken with a view to greater flexibility in the military instrument would not necessarily translate into a lowering of the nuclear threshold'. Klein, 'La France face à la seconde ère nucléaire', *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2006, p. 3.

[43] In Zecchini's words, 'It is to be hoped that France's potential adversaries will have grasped all the subtleties of the French deterrent': Zecchini, 'La guerre nucléaire "propre"?'.

[44] François Heisbourg, 'Le discours de Chirac sur l'arme nucléaire a surpris tout le monde', interview in *Le Temps*, 21 January 2006.

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Yet another practical question concerns the controllability of nuclear operations, including whether EMP effects could be limited to the adversary's territory alone. As some observers have pointed out, it might be difficult to control the radius of EMP effects. The French might therefore be deterred from undertaking an EMP attack by the risk of causing unwanted effects on an adversary's neighbours. If adversaries recognized this prospect of France's 'self-deterrence', the credibility of Paris threatening an EMP attack might be undermined.

A further difficulty may reside in the 'final warning' concept reinstated by Chirac in his January 2006 speech. As some French interview sources have pointed out, it might be imprudent and even dangerous in some circumstances for France to constrain its options by declaring that a specific strike constitutes a 'final warning'. The concept implies that a larger and truly definitive strike must follow if the adversary fails to change course. Is it wise, some observers ask, for France to have its latitude diminished by the 'final warning' doctrine? Depending on its assessment of the risks and dynamics (and their implications for France's interests) in a particular crisis, the French government might in practice prefer not to conduct such a larger strike, even though not conducting it might undermine the credibility of its declared deterrence doctrine. In short, despite their doctrine, the French may deem it prudent to be cautious and selective in asserting that a specific strike represents a 'final warning'.

Moreover, as some analysts have pointed out, for the new strategy to work, France will need high-quality intelligence capabilities. The credibility of the threat to retaliate with nuclear weapons against a state employing terrorist methods to attack France's vital interests depends on an ability to identify with certainty the state behind an attack. The evidence would ideally be sufficient to demonstrate to the French people and to France's allies and security partners (and third parties) that the French government had solid grounds for conducting nuclear retaliation against a specific state. Obtaining such evidence may present a great challenge, because a state aggressor attempting to 'circumvent' France's nuclear deterrent posture via terrorist means would presumably strive to avoid leaving any 'return address' information and would try to make the attack look like the work of non-state actors or other states.[45] André Rouvière, a Socialist senator, has drawn attention to the risk that 'provocative manoeuvres' might be organized to 'direct suspicion against a state not really involved' in attacking France.[46] In Bruno Tertrais's view, 'It would therefore be logical, so that deterrence can be credible in such a scenario, for France to dedicate a very important share of its intelligence effort to means to track [*remonter*] terrorist networks' and reliably establish responsibility for an attack.[47] France has in fact been investing in improved technical intelligence

[45] In the United States this intelligence challenge has led to the organization of a team of government experts capable of performing 'post-event forensics' with a view to accurate 'nuclear event attribution'. See William J. Broad, 'New team plans to identify nuclear attackers', *New York Times*, 2 Feb. 2006.

[46] André Rouvière, 'Audition devant la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées, Sénat, 1 Feb. 2006'.

[47] Bruno Tertrais, 'La dissuasion revisitée', *Notes de la FRS*, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Paris, 23 Jan. 2006, p. 3.

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capabilities, notably satellites, since the 1990–91 Gulf War.[48] These investments have coincided with the shift away from the Cold War focus on the Soviet Union to more global threat assessments and enhanced operational intelligence assets.[49]

## Inciting proliferation?

Some critics in France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe have declared that France's new nuclear strategy—including the acquisition of weapons with greater range, accuracy and flexibility—amounts to an affirmation of the utility of nuclear weapons and therefore contradicts efforts to downgrade their importance and promote nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. In other words, underscoring the utility of nuclear weapons may incite proliferation and undermine non-proliferation regimes.

Some critics argued that Chirac's speech was particularly damaging to diplomatic efforts concerning Iran. Rather than helping to persuade Iran to abandon its ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons, Nicolas Richter argued in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, France's new strategy might help convince Tehran that it has a solid defensive rationale for seeking nuclear weapons—that is, protection against potential French attacks. Moreover, Richter wrote, France's new threat of nuclear retaliation against terrorist attacks was unnecessary, since regimes sponsoring terrorist attacks could be promptly defeated by non-nuclear means, like the coalition operations in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.[50]

In contrast, Michael Stürmer wrote in *Die Welt* that Chirac had articulated a cogent threat analysis and strategy. According to Stürmer, Chirac had offered nuclear protection to France's allies, including Germany, reconstructed a strategic entente with the United States, and assured the French armed forces that they need not be paralysed in an epoch of asymmetric wars.[51] Moreover, some European observers speculated that drawing attention to military options might be helpful in the negotiations with Iran. Stefani Weiss of the Bertelsmann Foundation suggested that Chirac's threat intensified the pressure on Iran, because this was 'the first time that a European state … made clear that it is not disposed to let the United States alone have recourse, if necessary, to atomic weapons against states

[48] For background, see David S. Yost, 'France and the Gulf War of 1990–1991: Political-military lessons learned', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16, Sept. 1993.

[49] One of France's most noteworthy new assets is the *Dupuy de Lôme*, a long-endurance signals-intelligence ship. It could support the missions of France's aircraft-carrier, the *Charles de Gaulle*, which serves as a platform for ASMP missile-equipped aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons. In addition to collecting communications data, the *Dupuy de Lôme* could contribute directly to strike operations—for example, by mapping an opponent's electronic order of battle. According to the Defence Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, 'France's protection cannot be effective if surveillance is limited to the national territory. It is necessary to go further and further in intelligence and to be capable of intercepting communications everywhere in the world. This ship should enable us to obtain a maximum of information, which will enable us to anticipate the threat and to try to eliminate it at the root.' Alliot-Marie, quoted in Vincent Groizeleau, '*Le Dupuy de Lôme* à la loupe, enfin presque …', *Spyworld*, 31 Oct. 2005, available at www.spyworld-actu.com.

[50] Nicolas Richter, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 Jan. 2006, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, EUP 20060 121036001.

[51] Michael Stürmer, 'Nukleare Antwort', *Die Welt*, 20 Jan. 2006.



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whose nuclear ambitions jeopardize international security'. In her view, this made a major difference that could give a new impulse to the negotiations with Iran.[52]

Such positive reactions were in the minority. Representatives of opposition parties in Germany, including the FDP and the Greens, asked Chancellor Angela Merkel to intervene with Chirac to encourage him to exercise restraint and to ask him if France still supported the European strategy of limiting nuclear arms. Some members of the Bundestag in the CDU/CSU-SPD grand coalition also sharply criticized Chirac's speech as counterproductive for the negotiations with Iran.[53]

Merkel, however, expressed astonishment at the debate in Germany about Chirac's speech. She asserted that the speech was 'fully consistent with the long-standing French nuclear doctrine' and that doctrinal adaptations to new threats were 'perfectly understandable'. She saw 'nothing here to criticize'.[54] German government spokesmen added that they had no doubt that France would continue to respect its international obligations.

Rather than emphasizing the incitement-to-proliferation risk, some French observers have noted that proliferation confirms France's resolution to maintain its nuclear forces. Louis Gautier, once the defence adviser to former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and now a national delegate for the Socialist Party on strategic questions, recently drew attention to France's nuclear force reductions since the end of the Cold War:[55] 'Since 1990, we have unilaterally disarmed a great deal. Nuclear proliferation has continued, and our virtuous efforts have not brought along others.'[56] Evidence pointing towards continued nuclear proliferation has strengthened support for France's nuclear deterrent. As François d'Orcival wrote in *Valeurs actuelles*, 'The Iranian mullahs have given an excellent hand to French submariners, who feared seeing their budget trimmed again. The prospect of nuclear weapons in Iran, or in any other suspect state, reinforces the existence of French nuclear forces.'[57]

## Americanizing French strategy?

The new developments in French nuclear doctrine and capabilities remind some observers of certain parallel trends in the United States. Bruno Tertrais has written that the policies announced by President Chirac in January 2006 are 'rather

[52] Stefani Weiss, 'Ne sous-estimons pas la doctrine Chirac', *Le Monde*, 3 Feb. 2006.

[53] Pierre Bocev, 'Le plaidoyer de Chirac pour le nucléaire provoque des remous à Berlin', *Le Figaro*, 21 Jan. 2006.

[54] Angela Merkel, quoted in the letter by Gérard Errera, Ambassador of France to the United Kingdom, *Financial Times*, 30 Jan. 2006.

[55] Since the early 1990s France has dismantled its short-range Pluton and Hadès missiles and its intermediate-range ballistic missiles on the Plateau d'Albion, cut back its fleet of nuclear submarines armed with SLBMs from six to four, and reduced the number of weapons for its air-launched ASMP missiles. The number of delivery vehicles has thus been decreased by more than half. After conducting the 1995–6 nuclear test series, France closed and dismantled its test facilities in the south Pacific and ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In 1996 France began dismantling its facilities for the production of fissile materials at Pierrelatte and Marcoule. For further background, see Ministère de la Défense, Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, and Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Lutte contre la prolifération, maîtrise des armements, et désarmement: l'action de la France* (Paris: Délégation à l'Information et à la Communication de la Défense, 2005), pp. 64–9.

[56] Louis Gautier, interviewed by Jean-Dominique Merchet, *Libération*, 19 Jan. 2006.

[57] François d'Orcival, 'L'ultime avertissement de Chirac', *Valeurs actuelles*, 26 Jan. 2006.



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convergent with those underway in the United States and Great Britain since the end of the Cold War'. Indeed, Tertrais has added,

> If there is a domain in which one cannot radically contrast Paris and Washington, it is surely nuclear policy. The only difference that can be noted is that nuclear weapons hold a more central place in defence policy for France than for the United States. Contrary to what certain analysts think, George Bush's America has in fact reduced the role of nuclear weapons in its military strategy, and no longer considers these weapons as the sole means of strategic deterrence at its disposition.[58]

The growing similarities in French and US deterrence policies have not been widely recognized, partly because of the currency of distorted presentations of US policy.[59]

Despite their substantial reductions in deployed nuclear forces and in types of delivery systems since 1991, both France and the United States have (like Britain) maintained 'continuous at sea deterrence' with ballistic missile submarines—a capability initially designed to deter major-power threats, and still relevant primarily for this purpose. In recent years, however, both Paris and Washington have become increasingly preoccupied with regional powers armed with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, and have shown an interest in new nuclear capabilities to enhance their ability to deter these powers. At the same time, as noted earlier, both governments have avoided articulating a policy on the preventive or pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons and have enhanced their capabilities to undertake preventive or pre-emptive action with conventional means. Evidence of a certain convergence may be seen in the widespread criticisms of both French and US policy—for instance, supposedly 'lowering the threshold' for nuclear weapons use.

The points of convergence also include France's new willingness to recognize that non-nuclear means may contribute to deterrence. For many years the French rejected the concept of 'conventional deterrence', an approach of great interest in the United States since the early 1990s, as less reliable than nuclear deterrence and even 'dangerous'.[60] However, in 2003 the French acknowledged that 'the improvement of [conventional] capabilities for long-range strikes should constitute a deterrent threat for our potential aggressors'.[61] Chirac's January 2006 speech added a new recognition in French policy that, as many US experts and officials have held for several years, missile defences may also play a complementary role

[58] Tertrais, 'La dissuasion revisitée', p. 4.

[59] For background, see David S. Yost, 'The US nuclear posture review and the NATO allies', *International Affairs* 80: 4, July 2004, pp. 705–29.

[60] See e.g. the rejection of 'conventional deterrence' in the 1994 White Paper: 'It is illusory and dangerous to claim that they [advanced conventional military technologies] could prevent war like nuclear weapons. All the lessons of history plead to the contrary. These conceptions enhance the significance of conventional force balances, which are by nature unstable and founded on strategies of use, [that is,] of the preparation and conduct of war. They suggest the possibility of resolving international problems through the use of force and lead to arms races. They are not compatible with our strategy. Far from substituting for nuclear deterrence, a so-called conventional deterrent would only add to it.' Ministère de la Défense, *Livre blanc sur la défense* (Paris: Service d'Information et de Relations Publiques des Armées, Feb. 1994), p. 56.

[61] 'Loi no. 2003-73 du 27 janvier 2003 relative à la programmation militaire pour les années 2003 à 2008', section 2.3.1., 'Les fonctions stratégiques', available at www.legifrance.gouv.fr.

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in deterrence. Moreover, some French experts judge that Chirac's reference to 'a firm and appropriate response' borrowed from well-established US (and British) rhetoric intended to uphold deterrence while maintaining some ambiguity.

Some differences clearly remain. For example, the United States has not explicitly referred to deterring state sponsors of terrorist attacks with a threat of nuclear retaliation or to the possibility of EMP attacks as a 'final warning' to adversaries; and the United States continues to place greater emphasis on non-nuclear means of deterrence than does France. Moreover, France remains less committed to offering extending deterrence protection to allies than are the United States and the United Kingdom.

While the French have shifted from strongly held positions to adopt policies similar in some ways to those of the United States, their intention has obviously not been to imitate American choices but to deal with the current and potential strategic challenges they discern. Indeed, one of their main motives in adopting certain policies that happen to coincide with or resemble US policies has been to uphold France's national autonomy. The French remain, as they have been since the 1950s and 1960s, interested in bolstering their freedom of manoeuvre in relation to Washington and in lessening their dependence on the United States. What some observers have called 'Americanization' would therefore be more accurately termed a de facto convergence of some key features of independently developed US and French policies. Paradoxically, however, the evidence of such an 'Americanization' of French nuclear strategy is more concrete than that of its 'Europeanization', which remains comparatively speculative and hypothetical.

## 'Europeanizing' France's nuclear deterrent?

Some highly regarded French experts have expressed support for a 'Europeanization' of France's nuclear deterrent posture in the long term. According to Louis Gautier, 'It is difficult to imagine an isolated French strategic posture in the future in Europe. Our country can no longer play, as in the Cold War, its little Astérix role.[62] Either we move towards a common [European] strategic posture, or the idea of European autonomy will fail and we will go towards greater dependence on the United States.'[63]

However, despite comments to this effect by Defence Minister Alliot-Marie and others,[64] it is not clear that the French government intended to make Chirac's speech a point of departure for a new *dissuasion concertée* initiative. The French did not prepare their EU partners for such an initiative. Paris did not inform them

[62] Astérix is a French cartoon character created in 1959 by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. A small but courageous and resourceful warrior, Astérix lives in the only part of ancient Gaul supposedly not conquered by Caesar's Roman legions. He is thus a symbol of French valour, ingenuity and success in resisting foreign imperialism and maintaining national independence.

[63] Louis Gautier, interviewed by Jean-Dominique Merchet, *Libération*, 19 Jan. 2006.

[64] In his interview on 20 Jan. 2006, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Henri Bentégeat, also said that Chirac's speech was an invitation to France's European partners to consider 'as soon as possible' a common defence, and that such a defence would naturally encompass 'the question of the ultimate protection represented by nuclear weapons'.

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in advance about Chirac's speech, much less consult with them about its themes. When asked about Chirac's speech, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that he had 'only seen reports of it' after the fact and that he had not 'carefully analysed' it.[65]

In her January 2006 testimony, Alliot-Marie gave two reasons for the failure of France's 1995 *dissuasion concertée* initiative—the United Kingdom's closeness to the United States, and the anti-nuclear attitudes in some EU countries—and suggested, without offering any specific evidence, that both are changing.[66] Experts within and outside France noted with interest the fact that she did not refer to what may have been an even more important reason for the failure of the 1995 *dissuasion concertée* initiative: the series of nuclear tests carried out by France in 1995–6.[67] The context of the nuclear tests made it appear to many observers that France's initiative for an EU dialogue on nuclear deterrence was intended to dampen down the complaints, shift attention away from the tests and even make others share responsibility for them. The French were seen as telling their EU partners, 'we're doing this for your security as much as ours'. This contention was rejected in several quarters in Europe, with reactions of disdain and disbelief.

The vocal reactions to Chirac's speech in Germany in particular suggest how little attitudes have changed since the mid-1990s and what an uphill struggle France faces if it wishes to persuade its partners to build the EU into an autonomous nuclear-armed power bloc—what the French call an *Europe-puissance*. Most EU nations are not ready or willing to accept such a 'nuclearization' of the EU. Some EU nations oppose the very concept, and others prefer to rely on US nuclear protection through NATO. Some analysts in EU nations have argued that it would contradict the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and be seen as, to quote Peter Schmidt of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Berlin, 'an act of internal proliferation rather than as a measure intended to limit the role of nuclear weapons'.[68]

German and other non-French European analysts have argued that any European nuclear consultation mechanism should be built within a NATO framework. This approach has, however, been ruled out by French policy since the 1960s. Since its initial construction of nuclear forces, Paris has made clear that France alone will decide whether and how to use them in defence of its own security or broader interests; and it has remained France's policy to do so without participating in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) or other alliance nuclear consultation mechanisms.[69] Aside from the discreet Franco-British dialogue that has been under way since 1992, no initiatives for a European nuclear consultation forum have to

[65] The Prime Minister's monthly press conference, 23 Jan. 2006, available at www.primeminister.gov.uk. Blair added, 'I strongly endorse what he is saying about the threat today coming from rogue states, and states that are developing in breach of international obligations a nuclear capability.'

[66] Alliot-Marie, 'Audition devant la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, 25 Jan. 2006'.

[67] Some observers hypothesize that Alliot-Marie did not refer to the nuclear test series as a major factor in the failure of the 1995 *dissuasion concertée* initiative because that test series was ordered by President Chirac.

[68] Peter Schmidt, 'La question nucléaire dans les relations franco-allemandes', *Défense Nationale*, Aug.–Sept. 2004, p. 81.

[69] The other alliance nuclear consultation forums, all advisory bodies subordinate to the NPG, include the High Level Group, the Joint Theatre Surety Management Group, and the NPG Staff Group.

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date borne any visible fruit. The French have long been known for championing the EU's autonomy in relation to the United States and NATO. In the nuclear domain, despite their various consultation proposals over the years, they have often given the impression of favouring French autonomy in relation to their EU and NATO partners.[70]

## Conclusion

These issues and others deserve further reflection and analysis. For example, France's new nuclear doctrine raises the following additional questions: could the latest adaptations in doctrine promote closer cooperation between France and the United Kingdom? Is *dissuasion concertée* nonetheless likely to remain an elusive goal, in view of the policies of France's European Union partners? Could the French find reason to work more closely with the United States in defining complementary nuclear strategies? What nuclear force posture options and resources may be necessary in the longer term (2010–2025) to support the latest doctrinal adjustments? Furthermore, will France muster the political will and pay the price to sustain and modernize its nuclear force posture as well as its other military capabilities? If France fails to modernize both its nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities, the adjustments in nuclear doctrine will be of little significance.

Internal politics concerning France's nuclear deterrent have in recent years become closely linked to cost questions, which will probably be an issue in the 2007 elections.[71] The divisions between the center-right UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*) and the Socialist Party are likely to concern not only the level of defence spending, but also the allocation of funds for nuclear forces and for conventional force modernization (including frigates, A-400M transport aircraft, and a second aircraft carrier), as opposed to more funds for military salaries, benefits and operating expenses. Support for nuclear forces nonetheless appears comparatively solid, even on the center-left. While some Socialists, including former defence

[70] The Jan. 1996 French expression of a willingness to participate in a dialogue on nuclear questions within the framework of the North Atlantic Council does not appear to have led to any substantive discussions, as indicated in note 27 above. The closest the French came to accepting a consultation obligation was perhaps in Feb. 1986, when President Mitterrand made the following statement: 'Within the limits imposed by the extreme rapidity of such decisions, the President of the Republic declares himself disposed to consult the Chancellor of the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] on the possible employment of prestrategic French weapons on German territory. He notes that the decision cannot be shared in this matter. The President of the Republic indicates that he has decided, with the Chancellor of the FRG, to equip himself with technical means for immediate and reliable consultation in times of crisis.' François Mitterrand, statement of 28 Feb. 1986, published in *Le Monde*, 2–3 March 1986, p. 4. According to various German and French sources, the discussions following Mitterrand's statement did not result in any practical institutional arrangements for consultations. No Franco-German or Franco-NATO understanding on basic political, strategic and operational principles has ever been reached comparable to the guidelines worked out for US and British nuclear weapons in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group and other alliance nuclear consultation forums. French and alliance authorities have nonetheless exchanged views on nuclear issues on some occasions—for example, the discussions in 1975 between General Guy Méry, then Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, and General Alexander Haig, then SACEUR. For background, see Bruno Tertrais, 'La coopération militaire depuis 1969: La France, l'OTAN, et la question nucléaire', in Maurice Vaïsse, Pierre Mélandri and Frédéric Bozo, eds, *La France et l'OTAN, 1949–1996* (Brussel§es: Éditions Complexe, 1996), pp. 617–31.

[71] Jacques Favin-Lévêque, 'Discours de l'Ile Longue: tournant pour la doctrine de dissuasion nucléaire de la France?' *Défense Nationale*, May 2006, p. 11.

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minister Paul Quilès, have in recent years proposed scaling back France's nuclear ambitions, others—such as Louis Gautier—have argued for modernizing them in support of the long-term security interests of France and the European Union. Gautier has pointed out that the probable candidacy for President in 2007 of Nicolas Sarkozy, the leader of the UMP, could create electoral opportunities for the Socialists: 'Within the military community, the president of the UMP seems rather hostile to military spending. Another reason not to leave him this terrain.' The preliminary draft Socialist platform for the 2007 elections states that 'Nuclear deterrence must remain robust' (*en vigueur*) and based on 'independent' technologies and decision-making. It is worth recalling that Laurent Fabius, a former prime minister and one of the competitors for the Socialist Party's presidential nomination, said after Chirac's January 2006 speech that it contained 'nothing with which I am in profound disagreement.'[72]

[72] Fabius, Gautier and the preliminary draft Socialist platform are cited in Jean-Dominique Merchet, 'Le projet socialiste au banc d'essai (6/7): Faut-il diminuer le budget de la Défense? Rogner sur le porte-avions, pas sur le nucléaire', *Libération*, 30 May 2006.

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